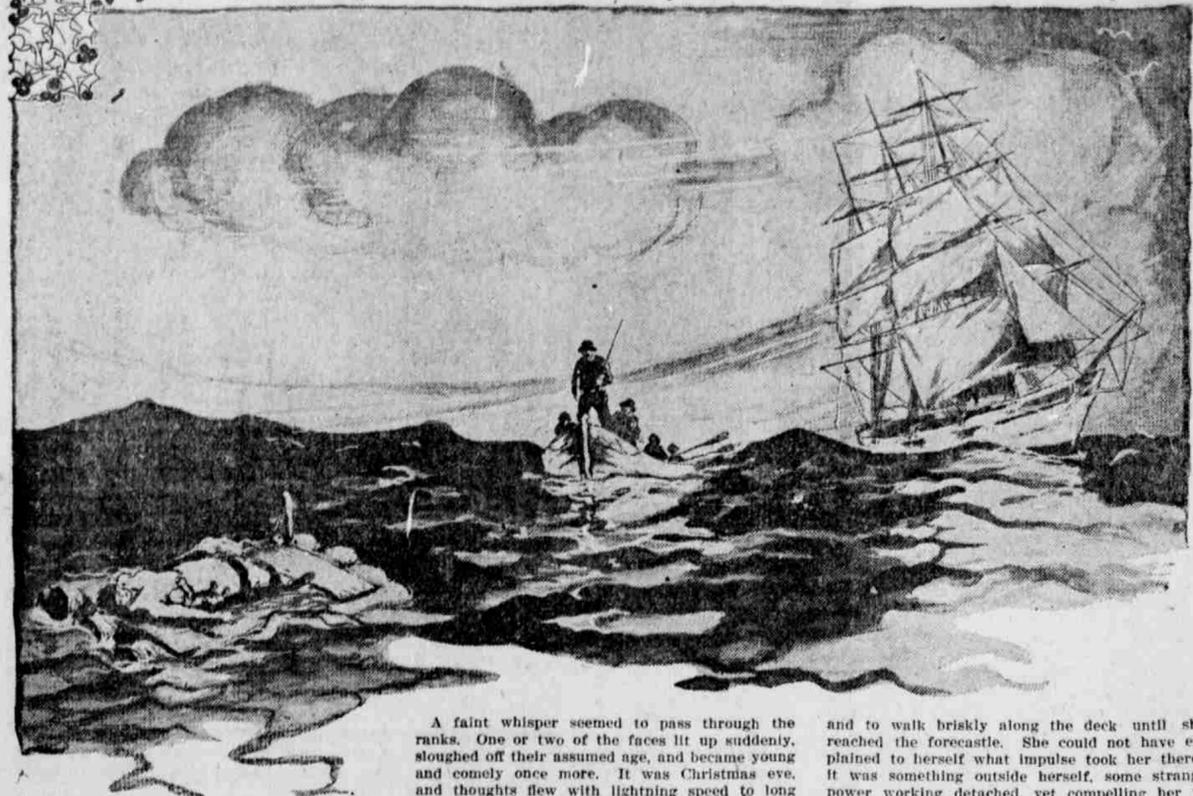


"Unto Us a Child Is Given"



By FRANK H. SHAW.

SAID Mrs. Hapshott: "You're a hard man, Hiram Hapshott. I never knew it until now—I named you for a kindly husband ashore."

"Ashore and at sea are two different places," replied the captain of the *Uriah B. Gaster*. "When I'm ashore I take things easy; when I'm at sea I act accordingly. Sailormen are dogs, and the more you beat a dog the better it is. So with sailors. Grind 'em down, rule 'em with an iron hand, and they'll not only do their work at the run but they'll come crawling along and ask you for more. That's my experience, and 30 years at sea, man and boy, hasn't inclined me to dispute facts as they stand."

"I call it cruelty," said his wife without heat, for she was a woman of sadness.

She knew the cause of that sadness, as did her husband, but it was never mentioned between them by a tacit agreement. Twenty-five years of married life had resulted in a fine endurance of marital affection—the skipper's long absences from home might have accounted for that in some measure. The two were good friends, and bickering between them was a thing unknown. There had been one child—very many years ago, but it only raised its voice once in the great world and before the mother's heart had quickened in response the voice was stilled forever. The Lord had given; He had also taken away, and Mrs. Hapshott endeavored to say "Blessed be the name of the Lord" with a good grace, though at times the saying was hard.

To hide his emotion the captain threw gruffness into his voice. "I'm thinking I made a mistake in bringing you to sea, lass," he said. "It isn't a place for women, least of all soft-hearted women such as you are. But you begged and prayed, and the owners seemed willing—"

"It got to be lonely waiting there ashore, Hiram," she said simply. "It was at nights, when the wind howled and the snow fell everywhere—I saw other women happy and companionable, with their men about them; and it—it was more than I could stand. It would have been easier if—if there'd—if Amos had lived." He understood, and his rough gnarled hand crept out along the rail until it rested on hers with the pressure of sympathy.

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"Hiram, I want to ask you a favor. 'Tis Christmas day in two days' time. Are you going to give the men a Christmas—a proper Christmas?"

Hapshott opened his mouth and laughed, a laugh that was pregnant with cynicism.

"Give them a Christmas—a proper Christmas! By which I suppose you mean a holiday and Christmas fare? Why, lass, they wouldn't know what to do with it if they had it. Besides, we aren't fitted for Christmas meals. There's a brace of chickens in the coop that'll make our dinner that day—I've been saving them up on purpose; but beyond the pig for 'ard—"

"Give them a proper Christmas, Hiram," pleaded Mrs. Hapshott earnestly. "It's a wonderful day ashore, though a sad one. That is, for me," she amended. "I always get thinking of the Child and of how happy His mother must have been, though she lost Him, too; she lost Him."

She thought the wound was fairly healed, but the hot tears gushed to her faded, pathetic eyes. Hapshott himself turned away, for he knew the ache at her heart; it companioned the void at his own.

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"All hands muster aft," cried Captain Hapshott. The men slouched along to the afterdeck and grouped themselves under the poop break. The moon sprang up from the blackening sea, and shone redly upon them; a full round ball. It showed sullen, despondent faces, faces without a hope. Mrs. Hapshott drew near to the plinail and looked down, her heart welled full of pity. She had done something—she had given these overworked beasts of burden one day's rest at least.

"It's stand by till midnight tomorrow," said the skipper in a voice that he fondly hoped betrayed no shame. "There's a holiday from now on. You'll take your wheels and lookouts as usual; beyond that—nothing. Understand?"

A faint whisper seemed to pass through the ranks. One or two of the faces lit up suddenly, sloughed off their assumed age, and became young and comely once more. It was Christmas eve, and thoughts flew with lightning speed to long forgotten homes, where Christmas had been a festival of delight in those bygone days before the hungry sea claimed them as its own.

"You've got to thank my wife for that," went on Hapshott. "She's asked me to give you a Christmas—a Christmas you'll have. Make the most of it. There'll be a fresh mess served for dinner tomorrow, and there'll be grog for all hands at eight bells. That's all—dismiss."

The men broke up, walked forward slowly, then, as if moved by a common impulse, they came back.

"Ve vish der lady for to dank," grunted a German sailmaker, fingering his cap. "Hey, boys, vat you says? Ain't it right?"

"Yes—ja—dot's it, Hans," came the replies. Mrs. Hapshott was aware of a strange compression in her throat; her eyes smarted. A stiffening of the crew was followed by something faintly resembling a cheer; then the men went forward slouchingly. Their tongues were busy and they wondered.

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Still more did they wonder Christmas day when, two bells having sounded aft, Mrs. Hapshott appeared among them, her arms piled high with gifts. From the commencement of the voyage her nimble hands had been busy with pins and wool, and now there was something for them all, warm caps that completely covered a man's head and held him immune from frostbite in the most rigorous weather; mufflers, Jerseys; not one was forgotten. Even the greasy cook, a man of foul speech and unclean habits, found himself the possessor of a sleeved waistcoat knitted out of the fleeciest wool.

"I hope you'll have a merry Christmas, men," said Mrs. Hapshott, and they cheered her—they were gaining practice—until the idle yards seemed to swing in answer.

Dinner time came round, and steaming kits were passed into the forecabin, kits that contained savory joints from the torker killed overnight. The men ate and were thankful, but when a monster plum pudding appeared they stared with awe-struck eyes.

"Don't thank me, thank the missus," said the cook, who brought the duff in person. "She made it herself—last night; mixed the whole bloomin' thing with her own hands. Ain't it a 'oneer'?"

It was—a very giant among puddings, and as toothsome as it was vast. Came, in the midst of the revels, a call aft, where the steward stood at the capstan with a dipper in his hand. Each man, presenting a pannikin, received a tot of sterling grog, for Captain Hapshott had resolved to do the thing well now he was embarked upon it; no half-water measures for him. Each man, receiving his allowance, raised his drinking vessel in the direction of Mrs. Hapshott, who was watching them from above, and drank a silent toast to her and to the memory of Christmas past.

So the wonderful day passed away and once again night drooped down upon the sea.

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Mrs. Hapshott rose, slipped on her clothing and went swiftly out on deck.

"Hiram—what was that?" The skipper had awakened and, missing her, had made for the deck. The faint streaks in the sky showed him a strange figure, clad in a gaudy sleeping suit such as sailors love. Mrs. Hapshott clutched at his arm and held tightly.

"What's what?" He had been thinking what a fool he would seem if the story were ever told of the day now past, and his manner was ungracious.

"That!" Her finger was outstretched and quivering, but all beyond was still dark.

"A sea bird—your nerves are on edge," he told her.

Mrs. Hapshott drew herself to the taffrail and leaned out, listening. The wind was waiving again; the ship had almost lost her way; she was only crawling through the water to the accompaniment of flapping canvas sloft.

"Hiram, it wasn't a sea bird!" The woman's voice was full of something to which her husband could put no name.

"It must have been—what else could it be, lass?"

"To me it sounded like—but, no, that's foolishness. My mind is playing me tricks, husband."

But she did not leave the rail for fully twenty minutes, and then it was to step down the ladder

and to walk briskly along the deck until she reached the forecabin. She could not have explained to herself what impulse took her there; it was something outside herself, some strange power working detached, yet compelling her to obey its behests.

She crouched up in the bows, watching the sparkle of water spring gurgling from the forefoot, watching the frothing bubbles stream away on either side the black bluff bow.

Vainly she shook herself and assured her own heart of its foolishness. Vainly she tried to drag herself away from her self-appointed post. The air was chill with the beginnings of the dawn wind; she shivered repeatedly and remained.

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Mrs. Hapshott lifted her eyes and searched the sea's far rim. Her gaze returned, only to be lifted again; suddenly she stiffened where she stood, and her ears strained.

She sprang upon the rail and stood there erect, her eyes peering intently. Was it fancy or could she actually see something?

There, in the middle distance—a veritable speck in the waste of waters—was it a shadow, was it the fin of a lurking shark, or was it—was it? Two seconds she looked, then she ran aft, the men watching her in wonder.

"Hiram—out there—what is it, what is it? Hiram, I heard a cry!"

She was clutching at him hysterically and pointing with trembling finger. To humor her he fetched his binoculars and focussed them. Madly, madly slow, she thought him. He searched idly for a moment, then his figure became rigid.

"Back the mainyard!" he roared in mighty voice. From the forepeak, whither he had descended, the mate came aft at a run; the men following fast.

"There's a raft out there—some one on it," said Hapshott slowly, his voice almost drowned by the clatter of the swinging yards.

It was Captain Hapshott himself who sprang into the boat that was hastily lowered; it was he who urged the rowers onward. Mrs. Hapshott, now that the thing was done, was possessed by a curious calmness, that yet held expectancy—something strange was happening out there beyond the range of her vision; but all was working together for good. She tried to focus the binoculars on the boat and on the fragment that floated ahead, but she was all unused to the task, and could make out nothing but a blur.

The boat turned—hung motionless; those aboard were busy at some task. Then the oars shot out like the limbs of a gigantic spider; Mrs. Hapshott's heart beat faster and faster—so fast that only with difficulty could she draw her breath.

"Shall we haul you up, sir?" halled the mate, reaching far outboard, and from Captain Hapshott's lips came a hoarse, unreal cry that Jones took as an affirmative.

The boat shot alongside; still the captain's wife did not move from her position by the mizzenmast. The tackles were hooked on, men swarmed up them and added their weight to the falls; the boat leaped upward, was swung inboard.

"Bear a hand here," she heard her husband say, and then the mists vanished from her eyes and she saw clearly. Captain Hapshott was coming aft, talking earnestly to the mate. And in his arms she carried a little child!

Mrs. Hapshott acted exactly as if she had been expecting this gift from the sea. She held out her arms and took the wailing mite, hushing it softly against that broad maternal bosom of hers, coaxing it, smiling down into its crumpled face. It mattered nothing to her how the babe had come—it was there; its tiny fingers around her finger; its little head nestled against her heart.

"A dead woman and a living child—no signs of identification." The words came to her fitfully, forcing themselves through the strange, hallowed joy that filled her being. "No telling what's happened—must be wife of some skipper—sole survivors—who knows? The woman's dead, poor thing—but the child seems strong enough—will be later."

"If we'd been sailing yesterday we'd have passed it in the dark likely," said the mate; "we'd never have seen it. God! look at Mrs. Hapshott; she's grown younger."

The skipper walked across to his wife. "We'll have to advertise," he said, shakily, toying with the little grasping hands. "But likely no one will claim it—it's as much ours as any one's—I'll tell the steward to make some milk ready—"

"Unto us a child is given," said Mrs. Hapshott solemnly. "Hiram, this is God's Christmas present to you and me."

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Tommy—Out of a job?
Jimmy—Yes. The boss said he was losin' money on the things I was makin'.

Tommy—Wasn't there anything else you could do around the place?
Jimmy—I think not. Anyhow, he said, I didn't seem to be able to do anything else.

Tommy—And what was you makin'?
Jimmy—Mistakes.

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ANSWERS CALL OF FRIEND
Deer's Remarkable Attachment to Man Who Had Cared for It in Its Helplessness.

A two-pronged buck deer answers the calls of Jerry Shine, employed by the municipal water district at Alpine dam, near San Raphael, Cal.

Long ago Shine one day came upon a dead doe in the trail of the forest, and standing beside the mother was a fawn. It was miles to Shine's cabin, but he carried the fawn home with him, fed it and gave it the name of Billy. After a time Shine left the district. He returned several days ago and asked his fellow workers the whereabouts of his deer. They laughed at him; the deer had gone back to nature, they said.

Shine mounted the parapet of the dam and called for Billy. The deer, now the proud possessor of two-pronged horns, bounded out of the forest. A photograph was taken of the man and the animal, as the latter rested his forefoot on the shoulder of Shine.

Poor Shooting.
This story of a dear old lady who was watching a match at Wimbledon is from Mrs. Lambert Chamber's book on tennis:

One player had been showing remarkably fine form. He had "got over" all his first services for several games when—bang! His judgment erred, and the ball landed in the net.

"There!" said the old lady. "That's the very first time that man has hit the net with the ball, and he has had hundreds of tries!"

Find Indian Bones in Bronx.
Workers on the tennis court of Max Kopp, a corset manufacturer, at Two Hundred and Fifty-sixth street and Palisade avenue, the Bronx, found two skulls and some additional bones recently which were declared by Robert Stepler of the Bronx morgue to be probably the bones of Indians.

Two skeletons were found in the same locality October 29, and it is said that the aborigines had a fishing colony there and probably a burial ground. The bones were found in sandy soil.—New York World.

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ALASKA APPEALS TO YOUTH
Newspaper in Great Northern Territory Promises Fortune to the Young and Adventurous.

The sage advice of Greeley was never more applicable than it is today in Alaska, observes the Alaska Capital. What the country needs is the optimism of youth, coupled with an adherence to the advice of Dr. Kilgore of Trinity college, North Carolina, when he said: "Young man, the sages will tell you to be prudent; prudence belongs to the darling of youth—the spirit of adventure that will develop individuality."

Reduce this philosophy to Alaskan terms, and we find that the territory just now needs youth to finish the structure upon the foundation laid by those wonderful pioneers whom we reverence and admire. The raw materials are here, materially and ethically all that is needed is for the next generation succeeding the pioneers to step into the trails blazed for them and finish the work.

Reason for Gratitude.
Little Edna was visiting the museum with her aunt. In the Egyptian room the child saw the desiccated remains of an ancient queen and asked what it was.

"That is someone's mummy, dear," replied auntie.

"Goodness!" said Edna, "I'm glad my mummy doesn't look like that."—Boston Transcript.

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